

VZCZCXYZ0003
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGB #0289/01 0351100
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
R 041100Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6445
INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T BAGHDAD 000289

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/04/2020
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [KJUS](#) [KCRM](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: PRT ANBAR: ABU RISHA DISCUSSES POLITICAL
ENVIRONMENT, NATIONAL ELECTIONS

REF: A. A) BAGHDAD 178
[1](#)B. B) BAGHDAD 124

Classified By: OPA Director Greta Holtz, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) This is a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Anbar
(Ramadi) cable.

[1](#)2. (S) SUMMARY. On January 19, PRT Team Leader and incoming
U.S. Division-Central (USD-C) deputy commanding general for
Anbar met with paramount Anbar Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, the
Mutammar Sahawat al-Iraq (MSI) Party Secretary, to discuss
the Anbar political environment and the March 7 national
elections. During the session, Abu Risha emphasized the
theme of Sunni fear of an extra-constitutional takeover of
Anbar by the GoI. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)3. (S) On January 19, PRT Leader and the incoming USD-C
deputy commander for Anbar met with paramount Sheikh Ahmed
Abu Risha at the sheikh's invitation. Some 50 other
individuals were present at the lunch, including Sheikh
Ahmed's younger brother and his nephew, the son of Sheikh
Sattar, who was assassinated in 2007 by Al-Qaeda.

"IRAQ MOVING TOWARDS A ONE-PARTY SYSTEM"
=====

[1](#)4. (S) Sheikh Abu Risha opened the discussion with a
denunciation of the Iraq High Electoral Commission (IHEC)
move to decertify 500 candidates for the 2010 national
election (Reftel A), saying that Iraq was "moving towards a
one-party system again. Anyone against it will be charged as
a terrorist. We have no power." He asserted that neither
the IHEC decision nor the existence of the Accountability and
Justice Commission had any constitutional foundation. He
stated his belief that the timing of the IHEC announcement
was meant to ensure that those excluded by this list were
unable to appeal in time to get their names on the ballot and
begin campaigning, and that the issue could have been
resolved earlier but was deliberately put off until just
before the election. He went on to repeat a sentiment
PRTOffs heard during a meeting of several sheikhs two days
earlier: U.S. forces (USF) should intervene. (COMMENT:
Sheikh Ahmed had a list of five MSI party members who are
apparently on the list of banned candidates: Dari Abdulhadi
al-Irsan, Hameed Turki Zibn al-Shoka, Muhammad Abd Awad,
Saleh Mahmoud, and Emad Abdullah Mansi. During the
conversation, he was attempting to phone each of them to give
them the news that their names were on the list. He was
unable to contact any of them due to poor cell phone
reception. END COMMENT.)

THE AOC A TROJAN HORSE?
=====

[1](#)5. (S) As the conversation moved toward security concerns,
Sheikh Ahmed expressed a fear that the Prime Minister's
office was politicizing the appointments of security

officers, and placing officers it could control into Anbar institutions. He cited as evidence the direct appointment of BG Baha Husayn Abid Hasan al-Karkhi as the interim Provincial Chief of Police (PCOP) by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, over the heads of both Minister of Interior (MoI) Jawad al-Bulani and the Anbar Provincial Council, with whom he believed power really rested. He also revisited the issue of MG Abdul-Aziz Mohammed Jasim Ahmad al-Mufriji's appointment as the Anbar Operations Center (AOC) commander last summer, indicating that his appointment, and the establishment of the operations center itself, were both examples of the Prime Minister's office taking extra-constitutional action to gain direct control of Anbar. "General Aziz has no legal basis for his job," Abu Risha stated. "The constitution says the Prime Minister leads the army, but the local government leads the police. So Maliki is firing police officers and replacing them with army officers." The USF commander explained that the centers were set up only in specific areas to coordinate Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) responses to insurgent threats and that the operations centers were an effective tool for maintaining security. He pointed out that not every province had an operations center. Sheikh Ahmed replied that those provinces without an operations center did not need one, since Maliki already controlled the governments there directly. (COMMENT: Sheikh Ahmed acted as if he was unaware of the state of emergency declared by Prime Minister Maliki which gave him the constitutional authority to establish the AOC, though he had discussed this with USF contacts several times before. When asked about this, he replied that "suicide attacks are not enough reason for this," and that the Prime Minister had no right to set up the AOC. Sheikh Ahmed placed responsibility for the appointment of the permanent Chief of Police at the feet of Maliki, rather than

his Iraqi Unity Alliance (IUA) coalition partner, MoI Bulani.
END COMMENT.)

THE PROVINCIAL COUNCIL WILL GO ON STRIKE

16. (S) Sheikh Ahmed stated that it was his belief that Maliki would not replace the provincial chief of police with a permanent chief from the Provincial Council's nomination list. In addition to "other measures", about which he did not elaborate, he stated that the Provincial Council would respond by "suspending its activities", or essentially, going on strike, until a permanent chief of police was appointed by the MoI. He stated that 18 PC Members had already agreed to take this action. USF Commander replied that this would be an unfortunate action to take at such a critical time before the election, and pointed out the interim PCOP appointed by the Prime Minister, BG Baha, appears to be an effective officer whose only goal is to improve security in the province. Sheikh Ahmed replied that he had no problem with BG Baha's efforts, but that, in principle, Maliki is infiltrating his people into positions of power. He stated that there is not one Sunni officer in the Ministry of Defense (MoD). When asked about the Minister himself being a Sunni, he replied that the Prime Minister is blackmailing his cabinet minister to keep them in line. Moreover, he asserted that most of the ministers and members of the Council of Representatives have dual nationalities which they use to "steal from Iraq." (COMMENT: On January 20, PRTFFs met with Acting Governor Fo'ad and asked his assessment of the provincial chief of police issue. In contrast to Sheikh Ahmed's assessment, Fo'ad replied that he anticipated no problems and the process was moving ahead as planned. Given Sheikh Ahmed's stated desire to see USG get directly involved in the elections process (Reftel B), it is possible that this threat of a "strike" is bluster meant to get USG attention.
END COMMENT.)

GOI RESPONSIBLE FOR ATTACK

17. (S) With that as a backdrop, Sheikh Ahmed then set the stage for the worst charge: Some of the sheikhs believe that

the GoI is responsible for attempting to assassinate Governor Qassim (Reftel B). "This is not a strange idea for us," he said. He related that, during the dispute between the provincial government and the AOC commander over the presence of the Iraqi Army inside Anbari cities, Maliki sent GEN Farouq al-A'araji to the AOC to meet with the Governor. The Governor was adamant that the law was on his side, while GEN Farouq was adamant that he had orders from the Prime Minister. The meeting ended without conclusion, and "10 days later, (the Governor) was attacked, and the Army came into the cities in response. Now things are being run by the Prime Minister's office." When asked by the USF Commander if he'd every addressed these issues directly with the Prime Minister, he said "no. (Maliki) would try to eliminate us." COMMENT: Acting Governor Fo'ad confirmed to PRT Team Leader the week before that it was he and the provincial council who asked for the presence of the IA in the city in the immediate aftermath of the attack. Moreover, Iraqi Army units are not presently controlling security inside the cities. END COMMENT.

NONETHELESS, STILL BEHIND THE VOTE

18. (S) When asked directly by PRT Team Leader his feeling about the election and his predictions for whether the Anbaris will turn out to vote, Sheikh Ahmed replied that he felt that only about 30% would go to the polls due to the Qfelt that only about 30% would go to the polls due to the ongoing dispute over the exclusion of candidates, the security issues in the province, and the limited campaign time available, and the lack of actual campaigning going on. He indicated that there are now rumors circulating that the GoI will postpone the election. Both PRT Team Leader and USF Commander stressed to Sheikh Ahmed the importance of every Anbari voting, including women. Throughout the conversation, Sheikh Ahmed expressed hope that the parliament would change after the next election, stating that "we have hope, but we are disquieted by the central government's actions." COMMENT: During the elections discussion, the Sheikh left the room for about 30 minutes for an interview with an al-Jazeera correspondent. During the interview, Sheikh Ahmed's younger brother, Sheikh Mohammed abu Risha, sat with us. Like the imams from the Sunni Endowment, Sheikh Mohammed appeared to understand the importance of women's votes in this election when he pointed to the reform movement in Iran and how Mehdi Karroubi appeared on television with his daughter next to him with no headscarf. "He sent a message of reform without saying anything. (The Iranian protesters) want reform, and their revolution is being carried on the shoulders of women." END COMMENT.

19. (S) After Sheikh Ahmed returned from his interview, the discussion moved to development projects and the current water situation in the province. PRT Team Leader gave a brief overview of the major projects on which the PRT is working with the Provincial Government, many of which Sheikh Ahmed seemed unaware, and the Master Development Plan. The sheikh pressed for more education and public health projects and commented that, "because it will be a turbulent time in the next few months, we want to move quickly." The meeting concluded with a brief update on the status of Governor Qassim and an invitation for PRTOffs to visit Sheikh Ahmed's farm. Sheikh Ahmed stated that "the majority view of the Sheikhs in Anbar is that we are thankful for the U.S. presence here."

110. (S) COMMENT: Sheikh Ahmed's comments during this meeting point to an increasingly antagonistic view by many Anbaris of the central government and the possibility of open opposition by the Provincial Government. The prospect of the provincial government ceasing to function just before the national election in protest of Maliki's handing of the chief of police appointment could threaten the political stability of the province, and undermine the progress made in governance in Anbar. However, these statements by Sheikh Ahmed may be more an effort to build a narrative to explain a possible

failure at the polls than a real picture of Anbari perspectives. At the same time, Sheikh Ahmed was very positive about U.S. efforts in Anbar and encouraged the PRT to meet with him regularly. END COMMENT.
HILL